

Communication Thoughts for Burlington Board of Health “Legalization Guide”

Because this document is published by the Board of Health rather than the city or another municipal department people are likely to look at the information through a health focused lens. The information provided in the document may be seen as recommendations for “healthy use”, particularly when the document is called a “guide”. With that in mind we offer the following thoughts for revised framing:

Overall – it might be a good idea to look at the document again and go through it with an eye for reading level. When we are making stuff for the general public we try to stick to a 5th grade reading level (this is what the VT Dept of Health recommends to make info accessible for the most people). I usually have one of my kids read stuff for me and see if it make sense to them! ☺

Front Cover:

- Suggest calling the document something other than a “Legalization Guide” – “guide” suggests that the document is a guide to legalizing use, or to using. From a health focused the lens, any substance use is not in the best interest of health and should be discouraged. For example, we would not produce a “legal tobacco use guide” because while tobacco use is legal for adults we know that use is not in the best interest of individual health. Perhaps change to something like, “Vermont Marijuana Use Law”?
- The picture of VT with a large cannabis leaf on it could give the impression that cannabis use is a significant/normal/expected part of life in VT.

Inside:

“CANNABIS in Vermont” – This is the only place in the document that the word “cannabis” is used. The law calls it “marijuana” so it might be good to just stick with that word. Technically, cannabis might be more accurate for what the law actually describes, but not everyone understands the nuance in that word so “marijuana” is probably a safer choice to make things clear.

“With marijuana use legal in the state of Vermont, the City of Burlington Board of Health has assembled this quick reference guide identifying some important features relating to marijuana. This guide has been developed for informational purposes only.”

Recommend changing to something like:

As of 2018 is it legal for adults 21 and older to have and use limited amounts of marijuana in Vermont. This quick reference guide explains key information in the law. Marijuana use is still illegal under federal law.

Why are we suggesting these changes?

-You have info about who developed the guide already on the back so you can get right to the point.

-It feels important right from the beginning to set the parameters for who marijuana use is legal for and how.

Marijuana and Driving

-As a health focused group it feels important to be clearer in this section that people should not use cannabis and drive. "Think about" alternative rides may not be clear. We do not tell people to "think about" alternative rides when they are drinking. We say, "don't drink and drive."

-Marijuana is the illicit drug most frequently found in the blood of drivers who have been involved in vehicle crashes, including fatal ones (from NIDA). It may be helpful to include this fact in this section.

-Unfortunately, because of how marijuana works in the body, the variety of ways it can be ingested, and the different levels of potency that different products/strains have, there is not a standard amount of time to recommend before someone should drive again after using... most of the stuff I've read says that impairment can last up to a max of 24 hours. So you could say something like, "Impairment can last up to 24 hours depending on the type and strength of the marijuana used. Please make arrangements not to drive after using."

Marijuana Possession

-the statement: "Persons under 21 years old are prohibited from using marijuana in Vermont." This feels like the most important info in the document but the color of the words makes it hard to read on the dark background. Is it possible to make it more prominent? It might be even better to say: "It is illegal for persons under 21 years old to have or use marijuana in Vermont." Just a little clearer and does not use "prohibit" which probably does not work for the 5th grade reading level.

Marijuana Use

- It feels like it would be good to include again here: "Marijuana use is legal in VT for adults 21 and older only."
- The two points about consuming in public feel a little unclear. It might be good to break it up like more like this and include info specific to Burlington:
 - Marijuana may not be used in any public place or in a vehicle.
 - Marijuana may not be used in any location where use of tobacco products are banned. In Burlington, all city parks, beaches and playgrounds are tobacco and cannabis-free.

-Because the guide is coming from a group focused on improving health in the city it feels like it would be good to put a health related statement(s) in this section about use. Some possible brief suggestions for wording that are backed by science:

- There is no recommended safe level of marijuana use for adolescents or pregnant or breastfeeding mothers. (US Surgeon General Jerome Adams, 2019). For more information to talk with a teen about the marijuana law or other substance use visit: **Parentupvt.org**
- Use caution if you choose to consume. Marijuana use can have a wide range of both short-term and long term physical and mental effects. For more information visit: **drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/marijuana** (you could also use the VDH website if you want to provide a more local resource, but I find the NIDA one to be better general

info. Here is the VDH link: healthvermont.gov/alcohol-drug-abuse/alcohol-drugs/marijuana)

The statement at the bottom of this section:

"Remember: these laws apply to both temporary and permanent residents of VT."

-Technically the laws also apply to visitors to the state. It would be more accurate to say:

"Remember: Vermont's marijuana law applies to both residents and visitors."

Back:

-Suggest removing the "Please Use Responsibly" or come up with a different phrase. "Please Use Responsibly" is an Alcohol Industry sponsored marketing tagline. They use it because by using the word "use" they are able to still encourage use but make it look like they are being responsible...because "responsible" use is not defined it has been shown to have no impact on actual behavior.

